

Lord Somerville 8135.f.

From the author

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

CONSTITUTION AND PRESENT STATE

OF

B R I T A I N.

By THOMAS SOMERVILLE, D. D.

Nec privatos focos, nec publicas leges, nec libertatis jura cara habere potest ;
quem discordiæ, quem cædes civium, quem bellum civile delectat ; eumque
ex numero hominum ejiciendum ; ex finibus humanæ naturæ exterminan-
dum puto. CICERO IN M. ANTON. PHILIPPICA 13ma.

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OBSEVATIONS

ON THE

CONSTITUTION AND PRESENT STATE

OF

BRITAIN

BY THOMAS BURNETT, ESQ.



The author of these papers, and publisher of the same, has been enabled to obtain a number of the most valuable and interesting documents, and to publish them in a more complete and accurate manner than has hitherto been done.

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1800

OBSERVATIONS, &c.

IT cannot be deemed necessary to use many words in endeavouring to prove the existence of the British constitution, to which the following pages principally refer. The form of the British constitution has often been described and explained. Its essential, constituent parts ; their co-ordinate, combined influence in the legislature ; their separate functions and interests ; are understood by every person instructed in the elements of domestic policy. The spirit and principles of our constitution, well-known and familiar, are the standard to which we appeal in all our political disputes ; and by which we estimate the merits and utility of measures of state.

Of the multitude of authors, who have written on the subject of the British constitution, none have entertained any doubt of its exist-

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ence; or have found any difficulty in ascertaining its characteristic properties. It is more to the purpose of the present treatise to remark, that, although in this list we find philosophers and politicians of opposite prejudices, and who in other points maintain discordant opinions, yet, without exception, they have all united in their praise of our system of government; and have ascribed to it a nearer approach to political perfection than has been adopted by any ancient or modern state. As this preference cannot be supposed to have arisen from any predilection for the English nation, it may fairly be ascribed to the invincible force of argument and the unbiaſſed conviction of the understanding. That this has really been the case will farther appear to every candid enquirer, who will be at pains to peruse the treatises alluded to; from which he will perceive that the subject has undergone a deep and accurate investigation; *it has not been taken for granted to be good; nor have encomiums supplied the place of proof**; nor has any thing been

* “ It is in this case as with what is called the British
“ constitution

been left to the precarious evidence of hypothesis ; but the distinguishing excellencies of our political fabric have been deduced from first principles and incontrovertible facts. *The equality of mankind ; their natural and imprescriptible rights ;* and every thing that has lately been held forth as the basis of civil regeneration ; have not been overlooked ; and the fitness and qualifications of the British constitution for maintaining the dearest privileges of human nature, and adjusting them so as to produce the most perfect social order and felicity, have been the grounds of the universal applause and admiration with which it has been honoured.

If these facts be admitted, surprize, if not somewhat of indignation must be excited, when we hear, that the being of our constitution has been called in question ; that it has been disparaged as something worse than a non-entity ; that its constituent members have been represented as empty pageants more deserving of contempt and derision, than of admiration and attachment.

“ constitution. It has been taken for granted to be good,
 “ and encomiums have supplied the place of proof.” Paine’s
 Rights of Man, part 2d. chap. 5.

attachment. That farcaſtical petulance, which tramples upon all the laws of decorum, and ſubſtitutes naked affirmation in the room of argument, may enchant vulgar minds; and plant an opinion where no antagoniſt-opinion is diſplaced. But men of an enlightened underſtanding, and of an inquiſitive and ſteady temper, will pauſe and conſider, before they make a ſurrender of thoſe ſentiments, which have been ſtamped with the venerable ſeal of antiquity, and recommended by the approving teſtimonies of the moſt illuſtrious names. But we have advanced beyond theory to the teſt of experience.

The proſperous fruits of our political government afford an argument for its excellence, which comes home to the ſenſe and capacity of every individual. The extent of our trade; the variety of our manufactures; the progreſs of arts; the cultivation of our farms; and the opulence ariſing from all theſe cauſes; exhibit an example of public proſperity almoſt unparallelled in the annals of any nation. Proſperity, in Britain, is not engroſſed by any rank or denomination of men, but diffuſed through all the channels of ſociety. The condition of every order, with a few exceptions, is more flouriſhing

ing than it was at a period within the memory of many who are still on the stage of life ; and is out of all proportion more so than in any preceding age. It is, indeed, in this free circulation and diffusion of prosperity, that the equality of mankind, rationally understood, consists. The most enthusiastic advocates for equality have never had the effrontery to propose the establishment of it by the equalization of property or fortune, because the iniquity and absurdity of such a scheme are obvious to the most superficial observer. It could not be accomplished without the most violent oppression ; nor could it be continued without reducing all the members of the community to the same level of abilities, industry, economy, and good fortune. In what, then, do I place equality ? I answer : In the same undistinguishing protection of the laws ; in having the same rules of justice applicable to every one ; the same assignation of punishment for crimes, without respect to the station or interest of the offender ; in bearing the same taxes and burdens, in proportion to the extent of property ; and that genius, industry, talents, to whomsoever they belong, should have free scope for exertion,

exertion, distinction, and reward. Is not such equality guaranteed by the British constitution? Is any man denied the protection of the laws, because he is of humble birth and mean fortune? Is any man exempted from their chastisement, because he prides himself in his ancestry, or title, or because he enjoys great political influence? Dare the descendants of the first family in the nation invade the rights or injure the person of the most friendless or obscure subject with impunity?

As all ranks of men are equal in the eye of the law, so they approach nearer to an actual equality in the enjoyment of the essential accommodations of life than is in any other district of our hemisphere. Necessary food and raiment, in consequence of the circulation of opulence, are within the reach of persons occupied in the most rude and unprofitable labours. Nor are the families of the lowest fortune debarred, like the Indian Casts, from ascending and mixing with the higher orders of society. On the contrary, while the rich and the noble languish under the stagnation of a stationary and determinate pre-eminence, a peculiar source of hope and animation is open to men of humble station in the higher gradations

dations of rank and fortune, to which they may aspire by cultivation of genius, exertions of industry, and success in adventure. And, accordingly, there are perhaps more examples, in Britain, than in any other country, of persons, who have set out in a low condition, and under straitened circumstances, attaining to abundance of wealth and splendor of rank. The familiarity of such examples has a happy tendency to check that despondency of mind which is inseparable from irretrievable depression; to rebuke the insolence of prosperity; and to promote a more kindly correspondence among all classes of men.

I am not ignorant of certain plausible objections which seem to invalidate the facts now stated. Persons of observation may, perhaps, from their own knowledge, produce examples of individuals and numerous bodies of men, which form a contrast to that prosperous description which I have assigned to the nation at large. How many individuals, who can neither be accused of idleness nor profusion, are utterly unable to sustain or rear their families? And are there not whole classes of men, whose useful labours find no compensation adequate
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to the unavoidable expences attendant upon the duties of their profession, and to their upholding that rank, and maintaining that intercourse in society, which belong to their birth and education? The following questions will suggest the reply to these objections. Is there any state of society, the most prosperous that has ever been realized, altogether free from similar exceptions? Are not examples of indigent labourers to be imputed, in some degree, to local circumstances, which they themselves might often remedy by changing the place of residence*? I again put the questions: Whether, from surrounding opulence and the spread of charitable dispositions, the most unfortunate and needy do not derive assistance and consolation, unknown to those in the same situation some time ago? Whether the hardships and difficulties of particular classes of men, in this country, do not unavoidably arise from an advanced state of

* I am happy in the knowledge of several facts tending to corroborate this observation. Some hundreds of families, who left the north of Scotland in consequence of the system of farming lately introduced there, are now employed in the large manufacturing towns in a way that enables them to subsist more comfortably than they ever did.

of prosperity ; and, therefore, afford a proof of its existence ? Whether it is possible for government, by any providence or benevolence, to exclude the possibility of inconveniencies which may affect individuals and particular orders of men ? and whether, from the access which all have to the legislature and the benign complexion of our laws, the British constitution is not better calculated to provide expedients for the mitigation and removal of them, than any other species of government ? The propositions for which I contend are these : That our prosperity is more general, and has risen to a greater height than that of any other nation of Europe ; and that this is owing to the excellence of the British constitution. To sustain the last proposition, I might compare the prosperity above described with the wretchedness and wants of the people, and with the comfortless ostentation of an unpolished aristocracy, who are subjected to the yoke of despotism. I might demonstrate the connexion that subsists between protection and industry, and between industry and wealth. I might trace the increase of particular branches of manufactures to the acquisition of new channels of commerce, and to spe-

cific institutions and measures, dictated by the liberal policy of our constitution.

But suppose again this connexion should be questioned, it will not destroy the conclusion to which I am to bring the above observations. Our prosperity, unquestionably great, from whatever causes it has sprung, must be exposed to dreadful hazard by a total subversion of government, or indeed by any essential change in it. Whether our prosperity has been originally derived from our constitution or not, is, in this view, an immaterial question. That it must run the greatest risque, if not certainly perish with it, is a fact that can hardly be refuted. A people, groaning under the enormous excess of aristocratic and regal tyranny, have nothing to lose, and may gain something by a revolution of government. They may perchance meliorate their own condition; and, if they can be so disinterested as to overlook an interval of convulsion and horror, which may run beyond the period of their own days, the sum of advantage may descend to their posterity, and immortalize their names in the future registers of fame. Distinguished by an influx of prosperity, which has excited the admiration

tion and the the envy of surrounding nations, the inhabitants of this island have much to lose, without the chance of gaining any thing, for themselves or their descendants, by the change of their political condition. What words can we find sufficiently expressive of the infatuation and wickedness of the man, who has at once disregarded the dictates of prudence, and been callous against the emotions and remonstrances of natural affection? Sons of Britain consider, while you sport with your own fortune, you are throwing away the portion of your children. Suffering for the iniquities of their fathers, plunged in anarchy, tumult, and blood; how will they execrate your memories, for having bereaved them of that fair inheritance which was entailed upon them by the merits of their wiser and more virtuous ancestors! Can such ingratitude to Heaven be sheltered from omnipotent vengeance by the cover of the grave? The unthinking prodigal can hardly augment his wretchedness and folly by staking the beggarly dregs of his fortune at the gaming table; but the most unaccountable excess of madness and rapacity is exhibited by the man, who, already possessed of opulence more than sufficient for the gratification

gratification of every desire, puts it all to hazard upon the equal chance of doubling his treasures.

But are there none among ourselves who approach in their hearts to the similitude of the weakness and iniquity which I have now portrayed? After all that has been advanced in praise both of our constitution and our prosperity, are there not some persons suspected of a desire to change the one, and hazard the other? and are there not many who complain of the abuses of government, and solicit for the reform of them? It is but too true, that the contentment of many of the people is not what might naturally be expected from the blessings which they enjoy. It is of the utmost importance to inquire into the causes of this discontent and tendency to innovation, in order to find out the remedies for the one, and to demonstrate the danger of the other.

Many causes might be assigned; but the two following are the principal ones; and comprehend every thing of practicable utility.

1. The abuses of government.
2. The interesting events which have lately taken place in two nations very differently related

lated to Great Britain ; the one composed of her friends and children ; the other considered, for many centuries past, as her natural and inveterate enemies.

1. Abuses of government are the professed, and, with many, the real cause of murmuring and discontent ; and have excited their suspicions of the corruption of the legislature, and of the decline of public virtue. Absolute perfection is beyond the reach of any human institution ; and it is not therefore inconsistent with the propositions already established to admit, that the British constitution, with all its properties, falls short of perfection. Whatever its defects are, it is impossible they can be concealed, or overlooked, or under-rated ; for, as a vigilant attention to the conduct of rulers, and a jealousy of the rights of the people, have strongly operated in the original formation of the British constitution, so those dispositions are again cherished by its spirit, and excite a quick perception of political errors ; suspicions sometimes rash and uncharitable ; and a full and adequate impression of the magnitude and danger of evils which actually exist. The effects of moral and political improvement are in some respects

respects similar to each other. In proportion to the progress of the individual in virtue, more sublime notions of moral excellence are adopted ; his past attainments are undervalued ; and his resolutions of future improvement become more ardent and expansive. The liberality, inspired by a free government, tends still farther to enlarge ideas of political perfection ; and stimulates men of an ardent temper to stretch towards the attainment of it with a rapidity, which outruns the gradual formation of corresponding sentiments and habits, essential to render the people susceptible of it.

But, notwithstanding of these observations, there are certain criterions for distinguishing between groundless and well-founded censures of government ; and between seasonable, attainable improvements, and those which are premature and visionary. When any opinion, relative to public affairs, has been generally favoured by persons of information, free from the bias of party ; and when it has been adhered to for a long continuance of time, and with firmness ; and opposed by persons in power upon the pretext of inexpediency, rather than upon any solid ground of argument ; it affords

a strong presumption of its being rooted in reason and justice. Out of the list of grievances which have been topics of discontent, there are three, which deserve to be selected and attended to from their conformity to the description I have now given.

1. The burden of a heavy taxation.
2. The imperfect, or defective state of representation.
3. The corporation and test laws, operating to the prejudice of a numerous and respectable body of his majesty's subjects.

1. The burden of taxes lies heavy upon the nation, and is especially galling to those, who, from their situation or profession, are excluded from any participation of public prosperity; and, whether a man be straitened or not, he thinks it hard that so great a proportion of his income should be taken out of his pocket, and transferred to the public stock. I shall not now insist, at length, upon those considerations which ought to be taken into account, in order to make a fair estimate of our public burdens; such, for example, as the effect or operation of the debt, or funded sum, which we are bound to pay. Because, if it was originally paid, or
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laid out for the regulation, encouragement, extension, and security, of trade and manufactures, it is plain, that the debt or tax ought not to be put down in the column of loss; but that, after the deduction of the tax, the reversion of profit ought to be stated to the article of clear gain. Nay, so far as the constitution itself, the basis of our prosperity, has required the assistance of the public treasure for its defence; such assistance, instead of being reckoned profusion or loss, has really been laid out to good account: Just as the man who fences his field from the encroachment of the river, or who meliorates it by cultivation or manure, finds ample recompence for his money and labour in the increased fertility of his crops.

But, after all these abatements have been calculated, there cannot remain a doubt, that a great reversion of the national debt has been wantonly contracted; and has imposed, upon the subjects of Britain, burdens, for which no compensation has been attained or can be hoped for. The expence of war since the Revolution has been out of all bounds, and has exceeded the example of any former age in our own country, or of any foreign nation
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which at this day retains its credit and its government *. Whether any of the wars, which have been carried on within that period, could have been avoided, may be a question of difficult discussion; but, it cannot be disputed, that all of them have been conducted with enormous extravagance, and absurdly and unnecessarily prolonged. Whence this fatal error, the consequences of which we feel and lament at this day? Has it arisen from the constitution, or the government, or the people? From the constitution or the executive branch of it, says that author, who yet denies the existence of our constitution. War, the greatest of all national calamities, Mr Paine, and some of the more temperate friends of the French revolution, consider as inseparably attached to monarchy. As this opinion contains an impeachment of our constitution, and as the evidence

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* Perhaps the public debts of the United States, the disproportion of territories and inhabitants being considered, are not inferior to those of Britain; but still the observation I have made may be true, because a great part of the taxes in Holland is appropriated to public works necessary to health, safety, and trade.

of it depends upon fact, it cannot be deemed a digression from my subject, to present to the reader, in a few words, the true origin and state of the wars, in which Great Britain has been engaged, since the Revolution; from which I hope to make it appear, that none of them can be fairly imputed to the arbitrary will of the Court, or even to its over-ruling influence.

The war that followed the Revolution, as will be admitted by all its friends, was necessary for maintaining the stability and reaping the fruits of that glorious event. The political state of Europe, at that period, was peculiarly critical and interesting. Lewis XIV. had formed the ambitious design of annexing the adjacent provinces of Flanders to his dominions, and subjecting the surrounding princes to a dependance upon his crown. The number and discipline of his troops, the abilities of his ministers, and the enthusiastic attachment of his subjects, afforded him resources superior to what any modern prince had enjoyed; and, if it had not been for the accession of England to the grand alliance, his success might have proved dangerous to the liberties of Europe. The Revolution was the cause of the accession
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of England to the grand alliance ; and the war was the consequence of that accession. It ought also to be remembered, that, long before the expedition of the prince of Orange into England was thought of, the alliance with the Dutch and the Emperor had been often urged, with the most pressing sollicitude, by the Whigs, as the only security for the general liberty.

The war about the Spanish succession, in 1702, was indeed a spawn of the Revolution ; but it commenced with the consent of the whole nation, and was continued by a faction who had the people on their side, long after it ceased to be agreeable to the inclinations of the court. When the passions of men have been agitated, and their fears raised to an extravagant pitch, it is not easy to stop at the precise point which secures their safety, or to restrain their resentment, for past injuries, in the hour of victory. The Whigs, and the people in general, who had been alarmed at the ambition of the French king, when his projects were unjust and his power formidable, had not the moderation to desist from hostilities, when the designs he prosecuted had more of the colour of justice and natural feeling ; and could not, by
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their success, affect, at any distant period, the political balance. The war, begun and continued for some time from the influence of these prejudices, was still farther prolonged, by a juncto in administration, for the most sordid ends, after the queen had grown weary of it; and, at length, her desire for peace, and theirs for war, was the cause of their dismissal, and of the restoration of the public tranquillity.

During the whole reign of the first prince of the illustrious house of Hanover, the nation enjoyed a respite from foreign war. The first twelve years of George II. elapsed before the sword was unsheathed; so that, from the treaty of Utrecht, 1713, to the declaration of war against Spain, 1739, the nation continued in a state of profound peace, the longest she had enjoyed for a century before. Who interrupted that pacific system, which had been so long pursued, and again plunged the nation into the expence and horrors of war? Was it the king? was it the minister? or either of the houses of parliament? The king, his ministers, and the parliament, were arraigned for their supineness, in bearing the insults and wrongs of the Spainards in the West Indies. The people became

became the dupes of their anti-ministerial leaders ; their clamours for war became loud and incessant ; the minister yielded with reluctance. A war, commenced perhaps without adequate provocation, was attended with an immense waste of blood, and terminated without substantial honour or advantage.

The war, 1756, undertaken for repelling the encroachments of the French upon the frontiers of our American provinces, had the approbation of every party ; and proved the most successful, but the most expensive, in which Britain had ever been engaged.

Over the American war, which awakens a train of painful sensations,—I could wish to draw a veil. With the questions of its justice and expediency, I have nothing to do. But, did the American war originate from the king, or the parliament, or the people ? It was the joint measure of them all. It was the war of the nation. Some indeed there were who remonstrated against it both in Parliament and out of doors, and, among the remonstrants at one stage, were found the names of those who had approved of it at another, and even some who had an active hand in directing and conducting

ducting it. For the proof of this assertion, I might appeal to facts fresh in the memory of thousands yet in life. When the authority of the British Parliament over the colonies was impugned, and the tax which it had imposed upon them resisted, indignation pervaded the generality of the nation. Men of every rank and profession felt, as if their personal honour or property had been infringed. The fatal catastrophe of that war wrought a mighty change upon the sentiments of the people. Individuals wished to forget their former opinions; they wished that others should forget them. I confess that I am often hurt with the shameful want of ingenuity and candour in many with whom I have the opportunity of conversing, when I hear them condemning the American war in the most acrimonious terms; and devolving all the consequences of it upon our S——n or his ministers, when I can well remember the time when they were warm in its defence; and, if they had been in the place of ministers, would have done just what they did; or, if their power had been equal to their zeal, would have conducted hostilities with resentment

ment and fury, which, fortunately for the honour of our nation, did not take place. It is the prerogative of the non-commissioned politician to raise his reputation upon the misfortunes of his country. Excluded from counsels of state, he reserves his opinion till after the event, or, if he has already given it, forswears it, and, with shameless effrontery, boasts, among his retainers, of penetration and foresight which he never possessed.

Besides the expence of the wars now enumerated, the public debt has been also increased, though not in a very considerable degree, by two civil commotions, or rebellions in 1715, and in 1745. The expence of these, I allow Mr Paine to place to the account of monarchy. It makes a part of the charge which the nation has paid for the Hanoverian succession. But then it ought to be noticed, that, if the supplies necessary for subduing these rebellions had been withheld, or the throne of the present royal family overturned, the alternative must have been—not a republic—not a representative government—but the recognition of a sovereign whose title was independent of those conditions, which
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cancelled the exuberance and danger of prerogative *.

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* Mr Paine seems to have contracted a malignant and implacable aversion to the name of king, which he endeavours to justify by taking it for granted, rather than by proving, that all the evils of government have flowed from that branch of the constitution.

It will occur to every person of candour and reflection, that it is not in the letters of a title, but in the prerogatives annexed to it, or vested in the person who enjoys it, that any mischief can accrue to the community. In different countries and under different forms of government, the name of king has implied ideas as various, and as distant from one another, as, that of the word *senate*, *assembly*, *convention*, or any other designation appropriated to any political body or description of men. Among the rude tribes, in antient Germany, the name of king was synonymous with that of leader or general; and, although the person who bore it had greater authority in the field and during war than any of the rest of the chieftians, or captains, yet, at the conclusion of it, he had no advantage over them but a larger share of the booty or spoil, which were the great objects of the irruptions of barbarians into the territories of their neighbours; and, upon their return to their families, he subsided into the level of his fellow soldiers. At Sparta, which had made a considerable progress in civil improvement, two kings were adopted as a part of the constitution; which, according to Mr Paine's idea, must have been a dreadful aggravation of public calamities; but the contrary was the case, and this united, or rather divided royalty, was just as harmless as that of the German sovereigns; and, however abused, could

Besides the actual wars recited, several attempts have been made within the period

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could not have been productive of one half of the oppressions exercised by individual members of the French convention.

A personal act of violence committed by the younger Tarquin, more than the tyranny of his fathers, occasioned the banishment of that family; and entailed upon the citizens of Rome a horror at the name of King, which the lapse of many generations could not abate.

Julius Cæsar, suspected of a desire of assuming the name of king which could not have added to the increase of his power, fell a victim to the prevailing antipathy of the Romans. The crafty Augustus suppressed the odious name, and, under an appellation more familiar to Roman ears, sheltered boundless authority; and himself, and his successors, perpetrated deeds of oppression and cruelty which stain the annals of the human race.

None but children and the vulgar can be frightened at a name. Men of common sense, not to say philosophers, will adjust their attachments, their hatreds and fears, to the essential, inherent qualities of the objects towards which they are directed. It were just as reasonable in the city of London to change the name of their principal magistrate, because it has been disgraced by the crimes of a Pethion; or, for future generations to stigmatize or expunge for ever the innocent title of *convention*; because the journals of the French convention make the blood run chill; as to condemn and abhor the name of king, because King Philip II. of Spain, Lewis XIV. of France, and Henry VIII. of England, were abominable tyrants.

alluded to for involving the nation in foreign hostilities ; sometimes by the people, and thwarted by the court, and sometimes by the court, and prevented by the people. If the suffrages of the people had prevailed, we should have had war instead of negociation with Spain, in the dispute about Falkland islands, in 1769 ;
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tyrants. Mr Paine gives ample testimony to the personal virtues of the ci-devant king of France ; and we may certainly believe him when a king is the theme of his praise. Let him, if he can, reconcile, to justice and humanity, the barbarities with which the national convention have treated a monarch, *who, very different from the general class called by that name, is a man of a good heart, and really a friend to the nation.* Paine.

It is the glory of the British constitution, that, by wise limitations imposed upon the first magistrates, it effectually prevents that abuse of power which alone can impart danger and terror to the name of king.

The character of our gracious sovereign, stript of all external splendour, will not suffer by a comparison with that of good men in any station. His private virtues, his temperance, his clemency, his decorum, his invariable respect to religion, at a time when religion is too much despised, ought certainly to procure him the esteem and affection of all the friends of morality. The mildness of his government, adapted to the forms and spirit of a free and mixed constitution, will consign him no subordinate place in the list of virtuous princes.

and, if the authority of the minister had not been irresistible, we should, probably, have entered into hostilities with Russia two years ago.

From the facts now fairly stated, the assertion of Mr Paine, namely, That the royal branch of our constitution has been the principal cause of war and of debt, appears to be unfounded and malicious. On the contrary, from past experience, we might expect the increase, rather than the diminution, of both these evils, from the augmentation of democratical authority. In support of this observation I might farther remark, that those ministers, who have discovered talents and a fondness for war, have generally been favourites of the people; and those, who were of a pacific spirit, and wished rather to accommodate all differences with our neighbours by negotiation and delay, have, for that very reason, fallen under the public displeasure. After all, it is fair to observe, that, even in those instances when war seemed unavoidable, and coincided with the humour of the people, it has been carried on more extensively, at a greater expence and for a longer period, than was consistent either with their interests or wishes.

es. And this may be imputed sometimes to the prejudices of the court, and sometimes to the carelessness and profusion of the minister. The anxiety of George II. for preserving his German dominions, by making the Continent the principal scene of war, led the nation into costly alliances, and inflamed the expence of military operations. The war, which commenced in 1756, might have been terminated, with equal honour and advantage, two years before the peace took place; and spared the nation at least thirty millions of treasure. Whoever will take the pains to inspect the reports of the commissioners of accounts, relative to the American war, will be convinced that it might have been carried on, upon the same plan, at perhaps one half of the expence; and that, next to the never having begun it, the best thing would have been to have concluded it sooner. But, neither do these concessions alter the nature of the fact, or give the least countenance to the doctrine of Mr Paine; that wars are entailed upon royalty; or that a change in our constitution would ensure perpetual peace. That is a felicity to be expected from the diffusion of light and civilization; and from foreign nations,

tions, as well as our own, forming true apprehensions of the united interests of the human species ; rather than from the genius of any specific form of government.

But, though our constitution be acquitted from the charge brought against it by Mr Paine ; yet, at the same time, its intelligent friends must perceive, that its safety and interest recommend the adoption of every expedient for alleviating the public burdens, and for removing the causes of discontent. Coincident events are naturally associated under the ideas of cause and effect. A person, who is depressed in his circumstances, is too prone to ascribe his ill fortune to the neglect of his friends, and the unkind agency of his neighbours. Examples from the history of every country demonstrate, that the influence of these principles, upon aggregate bodies of men, have been productive of civil commotions and revolutions in government. Famines, proceeding from causes over which human authority has no influence, have often been employed as successful engines to agitate the people, and shake the established powers. Heavy taxes, by a more obvious connexion, are traced to the influence

fluence of the legislature, though that influence may be directed by motives of necessity or kindness. Suppose, therefore, it should be admitted, that our taxes are not more exorbitant than those of any other nation, when the number of the people and our resources are calculated, nor the extravagance of ministers beyond the example of other times ; yet, it must be the wish of the patriot, that every plan for the reduction of the national debt, within the compass of constitutional authority, may be speedily and diligently pursued. I urge this with the greater earnestness, being truly persuaded that it is the point on which the people are most irritable, and from which the greatest danger to the constitution may one day arise. About abstract theories of government, which they cannot comprehend, they never can be long or deeply interested. But tell them of a form of government, which will ease them of their burdens, you need no other argument to convince them of its excellence. The prejudices of education and habit will yield to considerations of interest and comfort.

Agreeably to these views Mr Pitt's plan for reducing the national debt is entitled to our praise ; and, if not suspended by war, will operate

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rate to the substantial relief of the public. It is evident from the principles on which I have argued, that its effects in soothing the temper of the nation, and conciliating attachment to our government, will be more speedily and extensively promoted by mixing humanity with policy, and abolishing, in the first instance, those taxes which are grievous to persons struggling with straitened circumstances, and the maintenance of large families. But still it were to be wished, that something more were done, in the way of ostensible economy, to remove even the slenderest grounds of complaint or accusation from those who are unfriendly to government; that exemplary justice and moderation might be exhibited in the conduct of those who are sustained by the public revenue; and, that all redundant expences, in conducting the business and paying the servants of the nation, may be restrained. Considering the sacrifice of quiet and of time, the exertions of abilities and industry, required of those who fill the official departments of government, I do not suppose that any candid person will think that they are overpaid. The multiplicity of pensions and sinecures, and the exorbitant salaries of offices, which

which require no talents, cannot escape the notice and censure of persons who feel themselves pressed by the weight of taxes. This too is an evil, which may be plausibly turned into an objection against that equality, which I have described as a fundamental property of our constitution. Because, so much as any individual draws back from the revenue by pension or sinecure place, vested in his own person, or in his friends who must subsist by his generosity, if he had not interest to provide them out of the public stock, so much less in proportion, he actually pays in tax or contribution to the revenue.

Hereditary pensions are in many views, most justly liable to censure; and though it may be a dangerous precedent to revoke such as have been already granted; yet, every motive of policy and economy require the legislature to guard against their future increase *.

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* A considerable check has been lately imposed upon the increase of pensions, by a statute which puts it out of the power of the crown to grant any pension, exceeding L. 300 *per annum*, without consent of parliament. A considerable saving to the revenue was also obtained, by abolishing unnecessary

I am aware that the retrenchments of sinecure places and improper pensions would bring a very inconsiderable saving to the revenue, surprizingly less than one would naturally imagine. But still, they are an eyesore to greedy and envious men, who, being without hope of obtaining any share of the public bounty for themselves, either upon the score of merits or interest, have just eloquence enough to persuade the ignorant and credulous, to whom their walk is confined, that pensions are the sole cause of all our burdens.

It would be ungenerous to infer, from any thing that has been advanced, an indiscriminate censure of all pensions. Those, who have devoted their talents to the public service during the vigour of their days, ought to be enabled to spend the evening of life in dignity and repose. The blessing of heaven will abundantly recompence that public beneficence, which has sustained the widows and orphans of those, who had risen to distinction by their usefulness and patriotism. Science and literature, which em-

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fary affairs, amounting, I believe, to above L. 70,000 *per annum*.

bellish and improve human life, while they exclude their possessors from the competition for external prosperity, will be grudged the royal patronage, only by those, who are destitute of the smallest portion of taste for intellectual excellence.

2. The present state of the representation has been long made a topic of complaint ; and has much engaged the attention of our speculative reformers.

That there is something, at first view, strikingly partial and unequal in the representation, will be admitted without any dispute. That a man of small property should have a right to vote for a member of parliament, and that another, possessed of a property ten times larger, should be without that right ; that a mutilated and impoverished incorporation should send two members to parliament, while the most flourishing cities are without any, appears extremely exceptionable in point of justice and regularity. Is this evil, if such it is found, to be imputed to innovation, or to any degeneracy in the constitution ? or have any effects arisen from it detrimental either to the freedom or prosperity of the nation ?

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With respect to the first question, we are warranted by the evidence of fact to reply, That the representation never was more complete than it is at the present period, whether we consider the increase of the elective body, or of the members sent to parliament. A freehold property of 40 shillings *per annum* was made the legal qualification for a vote in the reign of Henry VI. The value of money, since that period, has sunk at least in the proportion of ten to one ; so that where a subdivision of property has taken place, there will be ten votes where there was formerly one ; and many small freeholds, formerly without votes, must now have attained to that privilege. From the same cause it is obvious, that the larger towns, though they send no representatives to parliament in a corporate or detached capacity, are not without representation, because their influence in the county elections has increased with the opulence of the inhabitants and the number of free-holds. Nor were the English representatives ever more numerous than at present. Since the time of Henry VI. they have increased from three hundred to five hundred*.

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* Blackstone, Vol. I. Book 1st, l. 2.

If it be true, that the representation, in general, has undergone no diminution, it is extremely disingenuous in those persons, who are urging a reform, to profess, that they only want to bring it back to its original purity; because, holding this language, they betray the ignorant into the suspicion that the democratical influence in the constitution has been invaded by regal or aristocratic usurpation, for which there is no foundation in fact.

Admitting, however, that the representation might be amended, yet there is no solid ground for suspecting that the public has sustained any damage by the imperfect state in which it has hitherto remained.

The interest of the body represented has been precisely the same with that of the body unrepresented. The proprietors of freeholds and copyholds, the inhabitants of royal burghs and of the towns without any representation, are equally affected by the taxes, the laws, and other political measures, flowing from the representative authority. The most specious plea of America, for refusing to submit to parliamentary taxation, was, its being imposed by persons
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whose own interest, as well as that of their constituents, was entirely different from hers.

The choice of members of parliament would probably have been the same, although the electors had been more numerous. Let any person inspect the lists of the members of the House of Commons since the Revolution, and as far as information reaches with respect to their influence, their abilities, their property and connexions, there is every reason for believing, that the same persons would have been sent to parliament, if the right of election had been more comprehensive and diffusive.

Supposing the representation to have been more general and more agreeable to theoretical perfection, the administration of public affairs would not have differed materially from what it has been. Many measures, pursued by successive ministers since the Revolution, may appear exceptionable, and some have unquestionably been wrong; but, if we consider the influence of the people in obstructing measures, either good or bad, and that, even under ministers of the least reputation, the nation has still been advancing in the career of prosperity, we can have no reason for believing that the public business would have been conducted upon a different

different plan, or to better purpose, under more popular elections.

But still, supposing the desire of a reform in the representation to become general: The principles and regulations upon which it ought to be framed are so complicated, and open so wide a field for wrangling and contention, and the expediency of it, so doubtful, that we need not wonder if ministers shrink from the question. That every thing of inequality should be abolished; and that persons of the same extent of fortune should enjoy the same political rights, are maxims of justice, which might perhaps be more easily reduced to practice. But, whether the right of representation ought to descend; and how far; are questions teeming with difficulty and embarrassment. No friend to humanity, or to his country, can wish for the distribution of political power among those classes of men, who are likely to be hurt by it, in their interests and happiness. Political power will certainly be a fatal boon to those persons, who may be interrupted by it in the prosecution of their industrious employments; who may be rendered unquiet in the station which Providence has allotted to them; who, from
prejudice

prejudice and credulity, are prone to believe every thing said to the disadvantage of their superiors, and to become the tools of restless and unprincipled men, who can find distinction only by deranging the order of society and clogging the wheels of government. Let the improvement and happiness of the lower ranks of men be pursued with constant and anxious attention by those who are in the seat of power. Let it be a principal object of their care to discover and remove every pressure and inconvenience under which they may labour; to stimulate and to encourage their honest endeavours for advancing their fortune and their station. But do not forestal the natural progress of things, nor deceive them by the flattering name of consequence, which cramps and enervates those exertions which conduct to solid and durable elevation. To express it in a few words, it were certainly better for the lower classes of men to be candidates for political power, than to be, prematurely and mischievously for themselves and others, hurried into the possession of it.

3. The injustice done to a great proportion of his majesty's subjects by the corporation and test laws have been long complained of as a grievance.

grievance. I shall not now enter into arguments to shew, that all, who are willing and qualified for serving their country, are entitled to participate of its trust and favours, without respect to their religious principles. I confine my observations, entirely, to the invidious distinction occasioned by the corporation and test acts. It is hardly possible for persons, who are stigmatized by the laws, to remain in a state of listless neutrality. Having no interest in the reputation or prosperity of government, they act as a sort of spies upon it. They watch all its motions with a suspicious attention; they put the worst construction upon every questionable measure; and they apprehend in the strongest light every actual grievance. When the conduct of ministers, and ecclesiastical establishments, come under discussion, they lose sight of that charity, for the want of which they are continually inveighing against ministers and establishments. In every emergency of government they side against it. To corroborate the truth of these observations, if they did not carry conviction upon the face of them, I might produce a long list of publications of an anti-monarchial, anti-constitutional tendency,

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cy, and it would appear, that the greatest proportion of them have flowed from the pens of Dissenters.

I am aware, that the argument may be turned against me by those who reason from appearances, without investigating causes ; and the conclusion which they draw is, that Dissenters are enemies to the constitution, and therefore unfit to be trusted with office or power. I reply, that I know of no religious tenet of Dissenters that renders them enemies to our constitution ; and that, therefore, they are constrained to become such from the partiality and severity of government. But this is but half the force of my argument.

For I farther observe, that, by the operation of the test laws, the government not only creates enemies ; but loses the support and service of men, whose moral dispositions are the best security for the discharge of every trust committed to them. This encomium I give to Dissenters, not as Dissenters ; - but as persons of principle, who revere the authority of conscience. It is difficult to persuade political men, who have not, perhaps, an opportunity of contemplating the most favourable specimens of

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human

human character, that objections to tests are founded upon principle ; or, that there are men, who conscientiously scruple to comply with any religious institution in obedience to civil authority. For the honour of human nature, as well as religion, it is to be hoped, that there are thousands, loyal to their sovereign and friends to the constitution, who consider tests as a more serious grievance, than taxes, defective representation, or any thing affecting their temporal interests. They believe taking the sacrament as [a qualification for a civil office, according to the form of any church, to be a perversion of the institution, and an infringement of the authority of their divine Master. If there are such men, and if their abilities and knowledge render them otherwise qualified for public service, what additional advantages might not be expected from their probity, their diligence, their faithfulness, and their acting under the serious impression of a responsibility extending to those secret motives and intentions, which are beyond the reach of human censure or applause. It were easy to demonstrate the fatal effects to government and to public peace, arising from want of principle, and the decline
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of religion, if recent events, both at home and abroad, did not supersede all argument ; and engrave them upon the heart with alarming conviction. The poison of scepticism cannot be confined to the member first affected by it. Like a gangrene, it spreads contamination from the extremities to the vital parts ; it makes havoc of all those wholesome principles, which are the seeds of private and public virtue, and constitute the true dignity and usefulness of human character. Men, who renounce all belief in the fundamental principles of religion, quickly proceed to call in question the existence of patriotism and virtue ; and when an opportunity occurs of gratifying their interest and ambition, though by means the most base and cruel, they know of no restraint from political principle or moral obligation. The duties of fearing God, and honouring the king, are wreathed together. Atheists vilify and deride the authority of magistrates ; and those, who have begun with a contempt of order and civil subordination, in the progress of their career, arrive at the summit of profaneness, and blaspheme the God who made them.

After all that has been said of abuses and
grievances,

grievances, which are fewer than in any government under Heaven, it ought to be observed, that our constitution, as it stands, is fully adequate to the redress of them ; which, therefore, ought never to be pursued by any deviation from constitutional rules ; or by combining with men who wish to destroy the peace of the country. Of all methods of reform, there can be none more dangerous in experiment, and more precarious in the issue, than calling in the interposition of that class of men, who can only assist by force or personal strength. What renders such agency dangerous, and almost certain of redounding upon the heads of those who employ it, is, that it can only be obtained by deceit, or making the people expect something more than can possibly be procured for them ; and, therefore, must finally disappoint and excite their resentment. For the truth of this observation, I might appeal to the consciences of those persons who are most vehement for a reform ; and might put the question, Whether, in the very title which they assume to themselves ; in the language in which they address the people ; and in the measures they propose ; there is not something, from beginning to end, fallacious

lacious and hypocritical ? What do they mean by calling themselves the Friends of the People, rather than the Friends of the constitution, or of justice, or of humanity ? Is not the obvious intention of this to make the people believe, that our rulers are not their friends ; that the friends of the constitution, that the associations for supporting it, are adverse to their interest ? And all this they do to ensnare the confidence of the people. For what end ? Not surely to assist them in the way of fair argument ; but by the terrific weapons of tumult and violence.

The promises which they make the people are couched in equivocal and ambiguous terms. Equality, a favourite word with them, they know assuredly can never subsist, in the sense in which it is understood by those persons, whom they mean to deceive by it. Again, is not the tendency of their complaints of the weight of taxes, pensions, and the extravagance of government, to make the people believe, that they shall be exempted from all taxes ; which they know to be impossible under any species of government ; and which would certainly be increased by the change of it in Britain ?

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As the people cannot be supposed to develop the mystery and deceitfulness of words ; it were to be wished, that they would attend more to characters and actions, of which they are competent judges. Is the conduct of those persons, who call themselves the Friends of the people, more pure and disinterested, more kind and beneficent, than that of men who have not yet assumed any popular designation ? Are they better husbands, better fathers, more industrious citizens, more peaceable neighbours ; are such of them as enjoy estates, or are distinguished by affluence, more generous to their dependants, than other men, who are placed in the same relations and circumstances of life ?

It must be acknowledged, that the Friends of the people, though they meant it not in their hearts, have rendered some service to their country. They have spared neither pains nor labour in collecting materials for libelling the government : They have explored every secret channel of information : Witnesses have been summoned to give evidence against it. What has been the result ? Heavy charges have indeed been produced ; but they have not been sustained by any shadow of argument or proof.

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To the conviction of every fair mind, they have been demonstrated to be scandalous and false. Abuses, circulated in whispers with alarming exaggeration, have been published; and what is the consequence? If they deserve the name of abuses, they have fallen so much short, not only, of the apprehensions of those who are tenderly anxious for the reputation of government, but they have so much disappointed the expectation of its enemies, that, despising the weakness and infatuation, we overlook the indelicacy and malignancy of those who have brought them to light *.

The late revolutions, in America and France, affecting nations differently related to Britain, and terminating in different effects, have not a little contributed to unsettle the political opinions

* Who could have believed, thanks to the editor of the Edinburgh Gazetteer, that the whole amount of the pensions in Scotland did not exceed, L. 25,000 per an. and that so small a proportion of that sum can be censured, by the most invidious, as improperly applied. I believe there is not an individual who deals in beneficent offices, who, upon a strict review of his conduct, would not find, that he has been sometimes imposed upon, and given his charity improperly; but this is an error in conduct which never can produce the bitterness of remorse, nor the censure of good men.

pinions of individuals ; and to weaken their attachment to our own constitution.

We have heard much of the happy condition of the American colonies since their separation from the mother country, and of the excellence of their government, as the source of their happy condition. Conscious of a supreme desire for the welfare of mankind, the refutation of the fact could yield me no satisfaction, though it should fortify my argument for a preference of our own constitution ; and for inculcating contentment and gratitude upon those who are under it. Rejoicing in the persuasion that America exhibits an alluring picture of general and public felicity, yet I can see no ground for inferring from it the inferiority of our own political condition ; or for wishing to change it. Were not the seeds of American prosperity planted under the auspices, and has it not been fostered, in its infant state, by the parental hand of the British constitution ? Did not the strong arm of Britain protect her children, ere they had reached the maturity of their strength, against the ferocity [of Indian, and the intrigues of European foes, combined for their destruction ? Say every thing you can
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of the prosperity of America : Let every embellishing circumstance be admitted : For all will redound to the honour of Britain ; and evince the soundness and generosity of that constitution, from which America derives her existence. The branches, bending under the weight of delicious fruit, direct the attention and praise of spectators to the original vigour of the stock into which they have been ingrafted. In the same strain of argument, I request the attention of my readers to an incontrovertible fact, namely, that the colonies, ere they had yet renounced their father's house, had attained to an increase of population, and to a state of general prosperity, with a rapidity unexampled in the history of any region in the universe. Are the colonies more flourishing now, than while they remained united to Britain ? Admitting that they are, does their present prosperity exceed that standard, at which they may have been supposed to have arrived, regulating the computation by the progress formerly made in any defined period, during their connection with England ? If America has grown great since her separation, beyond the proportion of her former improvement ; and if

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that improvement is to be ascribed to her constitution; yet, in this view of the fact, have we not something to claim? Do not the wisdom and success of the American legislators bear the strongest testimony to the merits of our political fabric? Is it not the model after which they have drawn the great lines of their plan? The foundations, pillars, and substantial parts of the edifice, are all of the order of Britain. The superficial structures, the arrangement and division of the internal apartments they have altered and modified, in conformity to their own particular taste and convenience. To drop the figure: The constitution of America retains the essential spirit, the fundamental principles, the leading maxims, of the British constitution. The innovations and the alterations, which she has adopted, were suggested by her situation and experience while conjoined with Britain; and, without any convulsive effects, involved in her disunion. America never had any subordination of ranks; and therefore no particular rank was infringed or degraded by her separation; nor was any violence done to predominant prejudices and habits. She never had the residence of royalty;
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and experienced no eclipse of splendour, nor derangement of government, by the extinction of the name. She has, however, supplied its essential uses, by vesting in the president of the Congress the collective prerogatives formerly delegated by the British sovereign to the several provincial governors. From the situation of the colonies; from the education and prejudice of some of the first planters; from the nature of their occupations, and the manner of their subsistence; their sentiments and habits were republican. They have expunged that part of our constitution which was discordant with these; and regulated the other parts of it suitably to their dispositions and external condition. The British constitution, new-modelled, may be fittest for the colonies, while, by innovation or change, it might be rendered altogether unfit for the inhabitants of the mother country.

It would be a mistake to infer, from these observations, that the British constitution is not susceptible of reformation and improvement. It is however of the utmost importance to attend to the nature of any improvement specified or proposed; how it has been suggested; whether

whether it be congenial with the spirit of the constitution; and, whether the expence and danger, to be incurred, may not exceed the benefit to be procured. Improvements may be suggested by the pressure of any inconvenience or grievance; by speculation; by example.

Improvements, arising from the first of these sources, have the most unequivocal claim to that designation; and may be accomplished with the least hazard to the state. Regulations of government, founded upon transient and periodical dangers, which bear hard upon individuals or collective bodies, ought certainly to be recalled when such dangers no longer exist. All the restrictions imposed upon Roman catholics, at a time when their power was hostile to the state, come under this description. It is unnecessary to multiply examples: They must occur to every individual of observation. In this wide field of improvement, the exertions of wise and patriotic ministers will be principally employed. It is the interest, as well as the duty, of the governors, to promote the ease and comfort of those whom they govern; nay, to do every thing, to keep the people in good humour, that can be done, without injuring
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the constitution, or betraying the trust committed to them.

Improvements, suggested by speculation, are of all others the most suspicious, the most precarious, and the most dangerous. Nothing so much mocks the pride of human wisdom, as the result of those political experiments, which have been founded on theories so specious, as not only to delude the imaginations of the weak; but to establish the fullest conviction of their excellence and utility, in the minds of persons, who are most distinguished by solidity and extent of understanding. The aggravation of misery and oppression has often been the issue of those exploits and measures, which seem the best calculated for the extension of freedom and happiness. By such examples, providence admonishes mankind, to be fearfully cautious in the region of political adventure; to distrust their own wisdom and foresight; to consult experience rather than theory; and to tremble, lest they should tread in the footsteps of the first transgressors, and forfeit a rich portion of tried felicity by grasping, ungratefully and ambitiously, at perfection denied to the present condition of humanity.

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Next to the suggestion of inconvenience or pressure, the safest source of political reformation is example, or the experience of others; but neither ought these to be adopted without a cautious and deliberate investigation of all those circumstances, which constitute either resemblance or dissimilitude in the characters, and external situation, of states and communities. As in the natural body, so in the political one, there are constitutional infirmities, and there are also adventitious peculiarities contracted by custom and example. As it would be injurious to the health of the individual, to persevere in the use of any kind of food disgusting to the stomach, however palatable and nourishing to the generality; so it would be improper to apply to our system of government those rules and maxims, which are repugnant to its genius, though they may have every recommendation of success where they have been practised. The respect due to adventitious habits may be illustrated by the same comparison. If a person has been accustomed to exceed in the use of the necessary refreshments of food and sleep till he has reached the verge of old age, it would certainly be dangerous for him to re-
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form too suddenly, and to run into the opposite extreme of abstinence and vigilance. Upon every innovation or improvement suggested by example, the greatest respect is due to the current prejudices and prescriptive habits of the society, into which they are to be introduced. To persons, of experience in state affairs, it will not be difficult to discern and improve those analogies, which may be useful in enabling them to ascertain the suitableness of foreign examples to domestic customs; and to estimate the benefit of imitating them. Though I have not had occasion to express the various modifications or names of political authority, the reader can be at no loss in applying these observations to the comparative circumstances of great Britain and America; and of marking the expediency, and indeed the political impossibility, of transplanting, indiscriminately, what may really be found improvements in the one, to the other. If any person should insist for an argumentative discussion of the question relative to the specific qualities of the political conditions of the two countries; and, if, after analyzing them, and illustrating not only the theoretical but experimental advantages of the one over the

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the other, the champion for the American cause should triumph in the appearance of victory, I have still one argument in reserve which I am confident he cannot overturn. Besides the deep deception of all political conjectures, the constitution and the prosperity of America have not undergone the test of time and experience. The constitution of Britain has remained firm and vigorous for a century past, and such a century of peace, of improvement, and prosperity never ran since time began its course. The appeal must ly to ages remote. It will be competent for posterity a hundred years hence to decide upon the question, whether Great Britain, or America, has been blessed with the best form and constitution of government.

Before concluding this branch of my subject, it may be proper to notice one eminent, local advantage of America above Britain, which, by contributing to her domestic wealth and felicity, may erroneously be placed to the merits of her political system. This advantage arises from the contiguity of boundless, uncultivated territory. The industrious labourer can never want employment and provisions for his family. The inhabitants of America are
strangers

strangers to that anxiety, which in a more limited country, and under the restraint of artificial distinctions in society, racks the heart of parents about getting their children settled in the world. Overflowing plenty of all the necessary accommodations of life excludes wants and sufferings, which neither the charity of the individual, nor the providence of the legislature, can banish from the most prosperous state, where luxury rivals the demands of nature, and the abundance of current species raises the price of every article of personal expence. The children of the planter are all born heirs of property; and the paternal inheritance, instead of being contracted or encumbered, is enlarged and enriched in proportion to the number of his children. A true representation of the patriarchal felicity of the United States may be conveyed by a comparison, which approaches nearer to our own experience. Suppose a tenant to have obtained a lease of a farm of immense extent and rich soil, for a term equal to several successive generations; he is restrained by the conditions of his lease from subsetting or alienating any part of his farm to strangers; but has full liberty to subdivide it among his

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own children in whatever proportions he thinks proper. In such circumstances, the profit would be comparatively restricted and small, if the lessee was without a family of children; it would be extended as they increased; and raised to its highest value, when superintending skill and labour were dispersed in such proportions and divisions, as were adequate to bring every acre to the most perfect cultivation, and the accumulative profit of the whole to the highest sum. Similar to this is the condition of North America in general, owing not to the political causes solely, but to local advantages combined with them; and therefore they ought to be separated, and can never warrant any disparagement of the constitution of Britain compared with that of America. Let us turn our eyes, from a bright and pleasing scene, to one that is truly dark and distressful.

The late revolution in France has given rise to a spirit of political speculation, tending to depreciate our domestic privileges; and to explode that satisfaction and pride which have hitherto been excited by the supposed pre-eminence of our condition.

It will occur, on the opening of this subject,
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that different sentiments with respect both to the policy and morality of the French revolution, and different affections towards the authors of it, will occupy the mind in the different successive stages of that event, to which we direct our attention. It is not easy to conceive, how any person of feeling, acquainted with the wretched condition of France for several centuries past, occasioned by the despotism of the prince, and the complicated, diffusive tyranny of a multiplied, and multiplying aristocracy, can dispute the propriety, the justice, the indispensable necessity of a revolution there. If ever there was a nation, whose patience was wearied out, whose resentment and indignation were wound up to madness and fury, by duration and extremity of oppression; if there ever was a nation mature for revolt, and justifiable for attempting it, France was that nation. The wonder is, in an enlightened age and country where the principles of liberty were understood, and the admiration of it kindled; the wonder is, that, in such circumstances, that event should have been so long postponed. Nor is it easy to conceive, how the annunciation of it could have been received with indifference

ference or coldness by any person interested for the happiness of mankind. The emancipation of twenty millions of our fellow creatures from wretchedness and oppression was a rational theme of exultation and joy. Existence, at a period affording such singular gratification to the noblest feelings of the heart, might, without affectation, be deemed peculiarly fortunate, and the cause of additional gratitude to heaven. When joy elevates the heart, we naturally turn away from those circumstances, which have a tendency to disturb it, or to suggest any doubt of its stability; nor are we disposed to harbour suspicions of the motives of those who have been the instruments of contributing so essentially to our enjoyment. It would be ingratitude; it would be malignity to do it. We give them full credit for the purity of their intentions when so much good has been produced, and such benefits have been procured to ourselves; for, by the benevolent heart, the prosperity of mankind is felt, is accounted his own prosperity. Under the impression of these sentiments, the principal agents in the French revolution became the objects of admiration and gratitude. Their private characters were

were not scanned with the severe eye of criticism; their motives were not explored; and liberal praise was bestowed upon their public virtues. Nor, while the grandeur of their achievement, in having overthrown the dominion of tyranny, was surveyed, was there any general inclination to pry into the imperfections of that system which they had erected upon its ruins; or to forbode its fleeting splendour and the new progeny of sorrows with which it was pregnant. So much in the way of apology, if any be necessary, for errors on the side of charity; or that precipitancy of decision, with respect to characters and events, which naturally flows from genuine philanthropy. The principles and dispositions, which I have described, must have been the strongest preservative against making any application of the French revolution disrespectful to the British constitution; or encouraging proceedings injurious to its safety. A man of a good heart will be as ready to dwell upon the bright as the dark side of things. He will be more forward to bestow praise where it is due, than to exercise censure where it is deserved; and he will incline to the side of gratitude rather than
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of discontent. Contrasting the situation of the people of Britain with that of the French before the revolution, persons of enlightened benevolence must have approved of the loyalty and contentment of the former, as much as they sympathized with the sufferings and praised the revolt of the latter. Applauding the French revolutionists, they must have condemned those men at home, who could conceive in their hearts the diabolical design of perverting their example to the undermining the credit of a government, whose beneficial effects afford the most sensible proofs of its excellence. Such persons will be affected with the deepest horror when they turn their eyes towards the present deplorable condition of France; and the keenest indignation must be pointed against those, who have been the instruments of blasting their fairest hopes.

As there were undoubtedly many who embarked in the French revolution, with no better design than that of gratifying their ambition and avarice; so, there might be in England, among the professed admirers of the French patriots, some who wished to imitate their example, by pulling down our own constitution,

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not to rear a better, but to enrich themselves in the wreck of national property. Approving of all revolutions promiscuously, whatever be their source or aim, they act in perfect consistency with their own principles, or rather want of all principle, in expressing the same satisfaction with the second French revolution as with the first; the same admiration of the republic that they did of the reformed monarchy; in bestowing as liberal applause on the convention as on the national assembly; and in transferring their affections from a Fayette and Rochefoucault, to a Robespierre and a Marat. With such persons, whose reason and feelings alike are deranged and perverse, it is in vain to argue or expostulate.

There are others, whose sentiments with regard to the present situation of France, it seems hard to reconcile with the good sense and humanity attested by the ordinary tenor of their actions. If they do not openly approve of the present political leaders in France, yet they are well pleased to listen to, and suggest apologies for them; or do not, at least, express that explicit and strong condemnation, which the late infamous proceedings of the convention naturally

rally tend to excite in every pure mind. Whether the government, vested in a national assembly and king, or a republic, be the fittest government for France, may be a ground of controversy. But it is grossly inconsistent in those persons, who, having examined the former, and held it forth as an example of political perfection, now become advocates for those who have overthrown it. What the new system of government, to be substituted in its place, may turn out, we cannot tell, because it is yet in a state of fabrication; but this we know, that the late revolutionists have repealed the fundamental laws of the constitution framed by the national assembly; and that they have expunged the monarchical branch. Necessity cannot be pleaded for a change so violent and complete. If the king had been treacherous, of which no evidence appears, he might have been suspended, or deposed. How ill regulated and imperfect must that constitution be, which knows no remedy, short of dissolution, for the misdemeanors or crimes of any of its members. In every view, in which it can be placed, there is a levity and wantonness in approving of the late revolution in France; because, as the effects

fects of it have been hitherto disgraceful, there can be no reason for believing that its existence will be permanent. When we contrast the deliberation, temper, and ability, with which the first revolution was concerted and formed, and the solemn functions with which it was ratified, with the confusion, precipitancy, and violence by which the convention was called into being; it seems far more probable that it should be superseded soon by a third revolution, than that it should have displaced the first.

If favour to the convention and new government of France be inconsistent with reason and steadiness of judgement, it is still more inconsistent with a respect to virtue, and moral obligation.

Of all the passions, which agitate the human breast, there are none of a more corrupting influence, than those which are incited and inflamed by political contest. The evidence of this fact, in a smaller scale, can hardly escape the notice of any person of observation in this country. Mark the spot of political strife, where a competition is carried on for a seat in parliament, or any office of great emolument

or authority. How sudden and palpable the inroads made upon morals and decorum? Indignation at vice loses its energy; notions of morality grow monstrously distorted; and the distinction between right and wrong seems at length to be abolished. There, the most unseemly discords and the most unnatural coalitions take place. The virtuous and the profligate join hand in hand. The zeal of the partisan supplies the want of capacity; and atones for the grossest moral depravity. To what enormous influence may the same passions be supposed to arise, when, not a narrow district of country, a burgh, or a county, but an extensive empire is convulsed in all its members; when, the question at issue is not the change or transfer of local, transitory, limited power, the degradation or aggrandizement of this or the other individual; but a complete revolution in government, in which many millions are interested, of whom every one believes that he has something inconceivably great at stake; and ambitious men are called forth to grasp at prizes so vast, as to break asunder all the ties of justice, humanity, religion. Every thing of atrocity and of horror, naturally to be expected from

from such a state of society, is at this moment realized in France. It were insulting to the feelings of the reader, to attempt any description of the horrible scenes which have passed there within the last six months. The simple narrative of facts, the unadorned tale of woe, melt and harrow the soul beyond all the powers of imagination and eloquence. It is perhaps impossible to find, in the history of the world, a period so much crowded with events, calculated to wound sensibility; and to rouse horror, astonishment and indignation. While they afflict, they also instruct. They bear home to the mind the conviction of this solemn truth; that anarchy and the dissolution of government are the most tremendous judgements, with which heaven in its wrath visits a guilty and devoted nation.

One crime indeed we must except from the black list which has disgraced the French patriots. They cannot be accused of hypocrisy: They have not abused religion by making it a cloak for their iniquity: They have not named the name of Christ. There is perhaps more policy than principle in this part of their conduct. In that night of thick darkness, when the gospel
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was hid in the mafs of human corruptions; when the teachers and the taught were alike ignorant of its fpirit and precepts; the moft atrocious deeds were fanctified by its authority. A Cortes and a Pizarro might forge, without detection, the warrant of heaven for f silencing every remonftrance of pity, which began to ftir in the breasts of their followers, who were commanded to torture and affaffinate the Indians, charged with no crime but ignorance of the true religion. But, when the volume of the gospels lies open to the infpection of the world; when the luftre of its benevolence fhines through thofe clouds of fuperftitious eftablifhments into which it has been incorporated; with what countenance could murderous, bloody men have professed to venerate its authority, or follow its rules? Muft not fuch glaring contradiction between principle and conduct have expofed them to the contempt of the more difcerning and ingenuous; while it could have added nothing to the refpect of their character, or the weight of their authority, with a ferocious banditti, who, like their leaders, thirft after blood, and trample on every moral and facred obligation. Are the friends of religion alarmed in vain, when

when they hear of their countrymen maintaining, and avowing connexion and intercourse with those, who have attained the summit of profaneness; and who, not content with a silent, inactive scepticism, have the effrontery to proclaim war against the authority of heaven*.

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* An exact translation from a speech made in the National Convention at Paris, (on the 14th December, in a debate on the subject of establishing public schools for the education of youth), by Citizen Dupont, a member of considerable weight.—As the doctrines contained in it were received with unanimous applause, except from two or three of the clergy, it may fairly be considered as an exposition of the creed of that enlightened assembly. Translated from *Le Moniteur*, a paper published by the authority of the Convention.

What! thrones are overturned! sceptres broken! kings expire! and yet the altars of God remain! [Here there was a murmur from some members; and the Abbé Ichon demanded that the person speaking might be called to order.] Tyrants, in outrage to human nature, continue to burn an impious incense on those altars! [Some murmurs arose, but they were lost in the applauses from the majority of the assembly.] The thrones that have been reversed, have left these altars naked, unsupported, tottering. A single breath of enlightened reason will now be sufficient to make them disappear. And, if humanity is under obligations to the French nation for the first of these benefits, the fall of kings, can it be doubted, but that
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There are some who being sensible of the suspicions of personal irreligion and insensibility, which attach to the well-wishers of the French revolution, take refuge in this argument; that the

the French people, now sovereign, will be wise enough, in like manner, to overthrow those altars, and *these idols*, to which those kings have hitherto made them subject? Nature and Reason, these ought to be the gods of men! These are my gods! [Here the Abbé Audrien cried out, "There is no bearing this!" and rushed out of the Assembly:—A great laugh!] Admire Nature, cultivate Reason.—And you, Legislators, if you desire that the French people should be happy—make haste to propagate these principles, and to teach them in your primary schools, instead of those fanatical principles which have hitherto been taught!

The tyranny of kings was confined to make this people miserable in this life;—but those other tyrants, the priests, extend their dominions into another, of which they have no other idea than that of eternal punishments; a doctrine which some men have hitherto had the good nature to believe. But the moment of the catastrophe is come: All these prejudices must fall at the same time. *We must destroy them, or they will destroy us.* For myself! I honestly avow to the Convention—*I am an Atheist!* &c. &c. [Here there was some noise and tumult; but a great number of members cried out, "What is that to us: You are an honest man."]

At the conclusion of this speech, numberless applauses arose, almost throughout the whole Assembly, and in the galleries.

the shocking enormities which have been lately perpetrated in France, and which they neither can refute nor palliate, ought not to be imputed to the established authority, or the generality of the present leaders there; but flow from the violence of individuals, who have ensnared the confidence of the people and intruded into public character, in the moment of agitation and terror. The flagitious characters of many who have filled the patriotic lists, in every stage of the French revolution, will be readily admitted. But, have not ouvert acts of atrocity been committed by persons of distinguished influence in the convention? Have they not been notorious? Have they not been stated to the convention? Has adequate punishment; has even any censure, been inflicted upon the guilty? Does not this conduct declare to the world the approbation, the adoption, of their crimes? Was not Robespierre, a name fit to vie with a Cataline and a Nero, in the competition for infamy, accused of the massacres perpetrated on the 2d and 3d of September? Was not his defence heard? Was it such as could be admitted by any person, who had a respect to justice, humanity, honour; or who wished

wished to cleanse his hands from the pollution of blood? What must we think; what must we expect from a legislative body, that can submit to the imputation of such enormous criminality? I further sustain my charge against the convention at large, by appealing to the monstrous iniquity of their decrees which have passed with unanimous consent. I specify particularly that, which subjects the estates of the emigrants to confiscation; and themselves to the punishment of death, if they return to their native country. I refer to their resolution on the 19th of November; which invites the subjects of every state to sedition and revolt against legal and established authority; and which, if their intention is fulfilled, must involve all Europe in desolation and blood.

But, allow the advocates for the French convention to make good the distinction between adventitious calamities, and authoritative, constitutional crimes. Let them accomplish impossibilities. Let them make the Ethiopian white. I am still authorized to infer, from the present state of France, a fact, which conveys the most interesting practical instruction to my countrymen. Oppression, assassinations, massacres,

massacres, are the awful and inevitable incidents of a revolution. You may unhinge a government, but you know not when it may settle again. One tyrant may be deposed, but a thousand may rise in his place, whose little fingers, in the emphatical metaphor of scripture, shall be thicker than their predecessor's loins. By diabolical calumnies upon government, you may excite a false alarm, and persuade your countrymen to unsheathe the sword ; but the next day it may be plunged in the bowels of your friend or your brother ; and you yourself, after having finished the career of what you deem to be patriotism, may suffer the death of a traitor.

If there are any, whose affections have been seduced by the charms of a meretricious form of liberty ; or whose understandings have been entangled with the subtle chains of sophistry ; and who are rendered incapable of discerning the force of argument, or the evidence of facts ; let them consult with conscience, if all reverence for sacred things is not renounced ; let them listen to the gentle voice of humanity, if its emotions are yet alive in their breasts. By the influence of conscience and humanity, the spell may yet be broken, their feelings may be rec-

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tified, and their understanding restored; and they will retreat, ere it be too late, from that path, which may conduct them to horror and destruction, of which they cannot measure the extent or duration.

They, who feel strongly the impulse of patriotism and pant after political perfection, will pause at every progressive step, by which they advance towards the consummation of their hopes. They will weigh every circumstance in the scales of reason. They will hold the beam with a steady hand: They will place in one scale the reform or advantage they wish for: they will place in the other contingency of success, the benefits which have arisen from our excellent constitution, and the hazard it may incur by innovation; and they will take their resolution, as the one or other preponderates. In the prosecution of every design they will maintain a supreme respect for the laws, and for established constitutional authority. Attending to the depravity of human nature, and the predominant temper and vices of the times, they will suspect and scrutinize the motives of their associates. They will shun all intercourse with unprincipled, profligate men. They know that the
curse

curse of heaven shall scatter the councils of the ungodly.

They, who are intrusted with the administration of public affairs, require, above all men, the guidance of principle and wisdom. The season is critical; the task arduous; the prize glorious. If they steer the vessel safe into the harbour before the impending storm bursts upon their heads; the praise and gratitude of posterity shall immortalize the names of their political saviours. Never was there a time that required a more delicate and judicious mixture of firmness and concession; of vigour and lenity. Sedition must be watched with a jealous eye; and when detected, consigned to prompt and exemplary punishment. In the hour of extreme danger, it is better to fear where there is no cause of fear, than by a supine confidence to give head to enormities, which, when once begun, defy all control of law and authority.

The observations in the preceding pages, relative to the state of France, were composed before the fate of the unfortunate King was decided.

The French Convention has now filled up the cup of its iniquity, and done a deed, all circumstances

cumstances considered, abominable and atrocious beyond example of human depravity.

Louis XVI. Shall not fall unlamented. His unmerited degradation; his insulted dignity; his cruel captivity; and the last tragical scene shall often be recollected, in the closet and in the theatre, with grief and horror. His predominant love to his people, the unexampled sacrifices by which it was demonstrated, his patience, magnanimity, and piety; shall consecrate his memory to the admiration of posterity; and devote that of his ferocious murderers to everlasting infamy and abhorrence.

Into what hardened profligacy must those men have degenerated, who can mention, with indifference or levity, crimes which bring the deepest stain upon their species? To behold, without sorrow and indignation, thousands of our fellow creatures overwhelmed with ruin; driven into exile; or perishing by the dagger of the assassin; and, under the affectation of a more enlightened philanthropy, to exult in the prospect of contingent benefits, which may arise from these calamities to distant generations, is the most consummate hypocrisy, and the most audacious insult upon the feelings and understanding

ing of mankind. What strange perversion of terms, when such men assume to themselves the respectable titles of philosophers and patriots? To violate nature; to suffocate every emotion of tenderness; to be callous amidst those scenes which tear and agonize the hearts of other men:—This they call philosophy. The subversion of government, whatever be its form or excellence; the most violent outrage upon the persons of rulers, however faithful in the discharge of their duty; the dissolution of all moral and religious ties:—This they call patriotism. Accursed be that philosophy, which, instead of exalting and softening, debases and hardens human character. Accursed be that patriotism, which, instead of promoting the peace, order, and prosperity of society, rejoices in anarchy, desolation and blood. “ Oh my
“ soul ! enter thou not into their secret ; to their
“ assembly mine honour be not thou united.”

F I N I S.

E R R A T A.

- Page 6. l. 15. *dele in.*
 9. l. 13. *for risen read arisen.*
 26. Note, *for magistrates read magistrate.*
 33. Note, *for affairs read offices.*
 39. l. 12. *for estimulate read stimulate.*
 51. l. 9. *for prejudice read prejudices.*

